

**STATEMENT OF VICTOR KNOX, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONCERNING S. 1483, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING THE JAMES K. POLK HOME IN COLUMBIA, TENNESSEE, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 10, 2015**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding S. 1483, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating the James K. Polk home in Columbia, Tennessee, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of this legislation with amendments described later in this testimony. However, we believe that priority should be given to the 33 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

S. 1483 authorizes a special resource study of the James K. Polk home in Columbia, Tennessee. This study would determine whether this site meets the National Park Service's criteria for inclusion in the National Park System of national significance, suitability, and feasibility, and need for National Park Service management. The National Park Service recently conducted a reconnaissance survey that preliminarily evaluated the James K. Polk home and found that, because the site has the potential to meet the National Park Service's criteria for inclusion in the National Park System, further study was warranted.

The study would also consider other alternatives for preservation, protection, and interpretation of the resources by the Federal government, State or local government entities, or private and non-profit entities. Alternatives might include, for example, the designation of the site as an affiliated area of the National Park Service, where the National Park Service would provide technical assistance to the site but not own or manage it. We estimate the cost of the study to range from \$200,000 to \$300,000, based on similar types of studies conducted in recent years.

James Knox Polk was born in Mecklenberg County, North Carolina, on November 2, 1795. In 1806, at the age of eleven, he moved with his family to Tennessee, settling in what is now Maury County. Samuel Polk, his father, purchased three lots in the town of Columbia in 1816 and constructed a two-story brick house (the present Polk Home) on the corner of West Seventh Street and South High Street. Samuel and his wife Jane remained in the house until their deaths in 1827 and 1852, respectively.

James K. Polk lived at the home after graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and for the next few years as he traveled to Nashville to read law with Felix Grundy. While living with his family and passing the bar in 1820, Polk began a successful law practice in Columbia and campaigned for the state legislature. Though Samuel and Jane Polk's house in Columbia was only a short-term home for James K. Polk, it is the only extant residence associated with the eleventh President, besides the White House, and marks the beginning of his political career. He moved to a new home a few blocks away when he married Sarah Childress of Murfreesboro on January 1, 1824.

The Polk Home in Columbia remained in the family until 1862 and then changed owners several times before it was purchased by the State of Tennessee in 1929. At the same time, a descendant of the Polk family established the James K. Polk Memorial Association of Nashville and the James K. Polk Memorial Auxiliary of Columbia committed to "operate, maintain, preserve, and restore" the Polk Ancestral Home and properties, and also to "perpetuate the memory of the eleventh President of the United States." The Memorial Association opened the home to the public in 1929.

In 1937, the State acquired the adjacent lot to the south and reconstructed the kitchen outbuilding. In 1941, the State bought the next-door Sisters' House; an 1818 residence constructed by James K. Polk's brother-in-law and inhabited by two of his sisters and their families. Additional land was added to the site in 1953 and 1961, expanding the garden. In 1961, the Polk home was designated a National Historic Landmark. In 2009, with private funding, the Memorial Association purchased an 1882 church on the same block and renovated the space into a state-of-the-art exhibit facility. The renovated church, Polk Presidential Hall, has hosted traveling and original exhibits related to the U.S. Presidency and American society and culture during the Polk period. Two privately owned commercial buildings remain on the same block as the Polk Home, between the Polk Presidential Hall and the reconstructed kitchen.

Although the site is owned by the State (with the exception of Polk Presidential Hall), the Memorial Association still administers and operates the James K. Polk Home and Museum while owning and preserving over 1,300 artifacts and original documents directly relating to President Polk. The Memorial Association also offers educational programs on President Polk to regional and national audiences. The Association has an eight-member Board of Directors that employs one full-time professional Executive Director and one full-time Curator of Collections. Two paid docents staff the Sisters' House and provide house tours and educational programs for the 10,000 to 20,000 annual visitors.

S. 1483 includes certain requirements for the study which we recommend deleting. Specifically, we urge deleting section 3(c)(5), which would require an analysis of the effect of designation as a unit of the National Park System on existing commercial and recreational activities, and on activities concerning energy production and transmission infrastructure, and on the authority of state and local governments to manage those activities. We also urge deleting section 3(c)(6), which would require an identification of any authorities that would compel or permit the Secretary of the Interior to influence or participate in local land use decisions or place restrictions on non-federal lands.

The purpose of conducting a special resource study is to determine whether a resource meets the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System and, if it does not, to provide information on alternative means to protect the resource. We believe that the special resource study requirements under existing law result in a sufficient amount of information and analysis of the effects of including a resource in the National Park System. These additional requirements could potentially increase the cost of the study and the time required to complete it.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.